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ABSTRACT

The emergence and development of symbolic interactionism, and its implications for the study of social phenomena, journalism, and mass communication, are examined in this paper. The introductory section discusses the emergence of symbolic interactionism in the midst of the rapid rise of industrial institutions in the late nineteenth century, points out that it can be taken as a model of American conceptions of communities, and shows how its antecedents may be located in the emergence of the Pragmatist movement and in parallel developments in American sociology. Separate sections are then devoted to the following topics: characteristics of Chicago journalism in the 1890s, which show the close relationship between the emergence of symbolic interactionism and the appearances of new journalistic perspectives; the link between symbolic interactionism and Progressivism; ways in which the American liberals who were the architects of Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism sought ways of releasing individualism from the forces of privilege; a major shift in American sociology, from theoretical discussions to urban research, in the early twentieth century; and reasons for the recent resurgence of interest among social scientists in symbolic interactionism and among historians in the Progressive period. (GT)

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JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL THOUGHT IN CHICAGO: THE CASE FOR SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM IN THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATIONS IN AMERICA

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The origins of symbolic interactionism are usually traced to three key thinkers, Charles Horton Cooley, W. I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead. Also deserving recognition for his role in introducing the perspective is John Dewey, a central figure in the Pragmatist and Progressive movements, who mainly borrowed Mead's theories of social psychology but in so doing gave them far wider currency than did the reticent Mead.

Taken alone, and interpreted narrowly as a scientific theory, the symbolic interactionism propounded by Cooley, Mead and Dewey has found its widest application in the study of social psychological phenomena, interpersonal interaction and small group behavior. However, the ideas acquire greater interest for students of journalism and mass communication when they are given a cultural and historical interpretation and when they are extended to larger social phenomena.

Symbolic interactionism emerged in the midst of what might be called the "Age of Organization," as Americans witnessed the rapid rise of industrial institutions, accompanied by increasingly visible and alarming concentrations of power in business and politics. As part of this process, or in a defensive reaction to it, many Americans were organizing themselves into occupational, political and interest groups to find a niche for themselves among the new power blocs of the industrial order.

These developments can be analyzed in political and economic terms, but symbolic interactionism furnishes a model of another dimension of the process--the cultural dimension of the building by social groups of new communities with which to identify. As such, symbolic interactionism gives us a record of men's perceptions and accounts of the social and historical dramas of their day, as all about them Americans were widely reorganizing their rounds of life, the communities to which they gave their allegiance and the models of conduct by which they lived. We believe that the recent resurgence of interest in symbolic interactionism reflects in no small measure a search for models and accounts of similar processes going on in our society in recent years, as once again Americans have witnessed an intensified concentration and organization of social institutions, attended by a new wave of groping by Americans for new communities and rounds of life.

In addition to describing the social reorganization going on around them, the symbolic interactionists gave expression in their theories to their hopes and visions for the future. But because their hopes that Americans were making a new society in the present to reestablish the proper balance between the ideals of individualism and community--ideals always in uneasy tension in the American imagination--represent a persistent preoccupation throughout our history, their visions remain relevant as a model of hopes still with us. And because processes of communication were the crucible in which the new society was to be forged, their visions represent the way in which countless Americans still look upon mass communications agencies--as the bearers of new worlds and communities to be expectantly celebrated or fearfully resisted.

Symbolic interactionism, taken as a model of American conceptions of communities, may be coupled with sociological analysis of the processes of formation, confict and transformation of the groups within which such conceptions are held, and the cultural productions such as mass communication in which those conceptions

are expressed, to enable us to look at mass communicated productions within a social and historical framework. This end is advanced by W. I. Thomas, who pioneered in the analysis of "personal documents" as indices of transformations in both personality and culture during processes of social change, and by his colleague Robert Park, who was influenced by the social psychology of Dewey as well as Thomas. Thomas and Park, both at times interested in the press as a record and agency of processes of social change, employed symbolic interactionist ideas as a social psychological model of personality, but coupled them with the attempt to chart larger social processes of group life and development, borrowing and extending the approaches of earlier sociologists such as Albion Small.

The crucial background and antecedents of symbolic interactionism, and of its extension into a model of larger social processes by Thomas, Park and their followers in the Chicago School of Sociology, may be located in the emergence of the Pragmatist movement and in parallel developments in American sociology. Both represented assaults upon Social Darwinism, the reigning social philosophy of the day, and upon the models of conduct--the style of individualism--represented by the Plutocrats, a newly visible class whose illegitimate power was seen to gain ideological support from Social Darwinism.

As such, symbolic interactionism and related intellectual currents of its day represented not only the rise of a new body of ideas to challenge the reigning intellectual orthodoxies--the revolt against formalism as Morton White (1949) has called it--but also an attack upon the models of human relations and the visions of society upheld by a social class, as well as an attempt by their challengers to devise alternative models of conduct and community for the future. The attempt was not to dissolve the individual into society, though that is perhaps where it led, but to reestablish the individual in accord with, instead of at war with, his society in the New Individualism Dewey (1930) called for in place of the Old Individualism. The matter is not disposed of as merely a clash of idea systems--though it involved that--nor as merely the clash of social groups contending over their respective interests and status in society--though it entailed that too. But in addition, the intellectual currents of the time represented the social construction of new models of conduct and visions of society and the attempt by their creators to make those new social styles and visions ascendent over their predecessors.

This rejection of tradition to build a new community in the present is the archetypal American act--the first settlers leaving the Old World to build a new life in the New, the pioneers leaving the East to make something better on the frontier, or Mead's vision of the reconstruction of the self and society in the nascent industrial order. As such, symbolic interactionism is a model of a faith resuscitated throughout American history--the faith in a community and a life style made in the present and untainted by the residue of history.

Sociology was one field in which, as Eric Goldman (1952) described the general intellectual ferment, a Reform Darwinism was rising to challenge the reigning Conservative Darwinism. The leading conservatives, the Britisher Herbert Spencer and his most noted American ally, William Graham Sumner, presented a deterministic picture of man as a biological organism caught up in an inexorable evolutionary chain in which directed human intervention was futile. But in early American sociology, the secular field into which a number of pious men of staunch religious

upbringing had redirected their formerly other-worldly pieties, the implacable determinism of Spencer and Sumner, as Roscoe and Gisela Hinkle (1954) write, "was not willingly accepted by American social thinkers committed to the tenet of individual volition so strongly stressed by Christianity."

Leading the assault upon Conservative Darwinism was Lester Ward, who accepted evolution but insisted upon the development of a capacity in man to control his environment--a doctrine that foreshadowed Mead's "emergent evolution" as a theory that retained evolution but permitted the consideration of distinctive human mental and symbolic faculties. Ward shifted American sociology from the biological foundation of Spencerism to an alliance with psychology, taking up the instinct theories prevalent in the psychology of his day. The subsequent story, of course, is of the shift of psychology from instinct theories to behaviorism, and latterly of sociology from approaches resting on those respective foundations. It was during the shift, when men were temporarily freed of the pitfalls lurking on either side, that the distinctive perspective of symbolic interactionism emerged.

Like Ward, Albion Small was outraged at the human ravages wrought in the Age of Energy and looked to sociology, which he conceived as moral philosophy, as a field in which to restore a concern for the whole man and a vision of the individual as a member of a moral community in place of the mechanistic determinism and empty formalism of Spencerism and classical economics. Small, like his more noted colleague Thorstein Veblen, tried to show that economic analysis by itself was trivial, that the abstraction of economic man did violence to the larger nature of the human condition, and that economic relationships occurred within, not independent of, the larger framework of social relationships--a lesson that today might profitably be applied to the study of mass communication "effects" in isolation from the larger cultural framework within which mass communication takes place. Small staked out as the distinctive task of sociology the study of "social relations," and throughout his career there is a movement in his thought and writings from the assumption of an individual base underlying motivation, along Wardian lines, to the assumption of a social or group base.

Small was influential in bequeathing to Thomas and Park a framework for social analysis that the latter would marry with the social psychological insights of symbolic interactionism. Perhaps from Small, too, Thomas and Park partly drew their recognition of conflict as a central and immutable element in social life--in a healthy corrective to the overly optimistic prospects for unity and consensus implicit in the formulations of Cooley, Mead and Dewey. To Small, the study of groups and social relations did not mean, as it would in later transmutations, the study of the way properties of the group trigger or determine the behavior of individuals--as in the Durkheimian metaphor of society as a container that checks and molds the actions of persons within--but the study of the group as an acting unit in the ongoing process of social life. As Park's biographer (Matthews, 1977) writes:

> Small concluded that social life must be understood as a constant formation, combination, conflict, and destruction of groups seeking to realize their interests. Sociology was to be a study, not of static social structures or of immutable institutions and functions, but a continuing and open-ended social process, whose motive power was the conflict of interest groups.

The major intellectual crucible in which symbolic interactionism emerged was the Pragmatist movement, with Dewey at its center, Mead in the wings, and Cooley, Thomas and Park drawing upon it in devising their sociological formulations. As interpreted by intellectual historians, Pragmatism was primarily an effort to redirect the various academic disciplines in which it surfaced away from reigning formalistic systems of thought toward practical affairs of the world. Thus in Reconstruction in Philosophy Dewey (1920) called upon philosophers to turn from epistemology and metaphysics to politics, education and morals. "Philosophy recovers itself, Dewey (1917a) wrote, "when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men." The gulf between the concerns embraced by formalistic orthodoxies and the affairs of the contemporary world, Mead (1964) wrote, "has made economics the dismal science. It has mechanized and anatomized psychology. It has made ethics utilitarian, and aesthetics an affair of esoteric formulae."

Also central to the general ferment of Pragmatism was a rebellion against the closed nature and the proclaimed finality of the dominant intellectual orthodoxies. A declaration of the existence of novelty, chance and uncertainty in the world was a central tenet of Pragmatism. James attacked "block-universe" philosophies, and Dewey charged that the doctrine of a single valid kind of truth was the "ultimate refuge of the standpatter." The Reform Darwinists turned the doctrine of evolution itself upon their conservative foes, charging that since thought itself evolved the reigning orthodoxies were destined to be toppled, in their effort, as Goldman (1952) put it, to overthrow "the dreary inevitabilities of Conservative Darwinism with the radiant hopefulness of Reform Darwinism."

In a related move, the revolt against formalism was a revolt against the excessively narrow way in which the established disciplines pursued and explained their concerns. The reformers turned to what Morton White (1949) called "cultural organicism"--"the attempt to find explanations and relevant material in social sciences other than the one which is primarily under investigation." Dewey (1917b) attacked the "monistic" character of the social sciences:

> How often we have been invited to build up our social, political, and ethical explanations in terms of some single and supposedly dominant mental constituent! How often discussions and disputes have been, at bottom, only a question as to which of rival single claimants we shall yield allegiance. . . . Henceforth it is, I submit, pure willfulness if any one pretending to a scientific treatment starts from any other than a pluralistic basis: the complexity and specific variety of the factors of human nature.

In short, Pragmatism may be interpreted, not only as an intellectual revolt against a reigning system of ideas, but as a cultural movement reenacting that most characteristic American act in which men restless with the legacy, fetters and constraints bequeathed by the past sought to renounce history and start over in the present.

The assault mounted by Pragmatists upon the stifling effects of the closed systems of thought in vogue was, of course, an attack also upon the social class, the Plutocrats, whose recent and rapid ascent to positions of power and status in

society was seen to receive ideological support from the intellectual orthodoxies. But to reduce the clash to a conflict between interest groups, and their systems of thought to ideologies legitimizing their respective interests, misses the cultural meaning, as a pattern of symbolic action, of the cultural movement the Pragmatists were waging. The closed, stifling effect of the intellectual orthodoxies appeared to the Pragmatists as one more manifestation of the classic villain of American history: the suffocation of open possibilities for the individual brought about by the cultural complexity and artificial social structure that were the inevitable products of history. Once more, then, in the Pragmatist movement, Americans were searching for a new frontier. As David Noble (1970) writes:

> Dewey, like Veblen, was reminding his fellow Americans that their Puritan ancestors were supposed to have rejected the complex metaphysics and theology of medieval civilization that had been used to rationalize the power of the parasitical feudal aristocracy and priesthood by which they had exploited the productive masses. He was reminding them that their capitalist ancestors had promised to return to a simple natural state where every man could be a free and equal producer. . . . America in 1900 had a leisure class and, like all leisure classes in the past, it used artificial metaphysics and theology to justify its nonfunctional, destructive role.

Recently, New Left historians have argued that the Progressive movement, with Pragmatism as its philosophical platform, failed to alter the old order it set out to reform. It could even be argued that it got us into something worse, for, as its critics charge, Pragmatism may lead to an ethic of social manipulation and control. "Spencer's outlook," writes Richard Hofstadter (1944), "had been the congenial expression of a period that looked to automatic progress and laissez faire for its salvation; pragmatism was absorbed into the national culture when men were thinking of manipulation and control."

In bequeathing to men a cultural model of action that would enable them to gain control of the environment, Pragmatism held out as its seminal contribution a new psychology. In place of the Spencerian assumption of mental processes as inner adjustments to outer conditions, Pragmatism held out a model of man as self-stimulating, with the concept of modifiable interests or impulses displacing the instincts, changeable only through slow evolutionary processes, of the older psychology.

The revised psychology entailed a revised conception of the nature of knowledge, which stood at the heart of the attack on formal systems and of Dewey's repeated attacks on dualisms. Thinking was not transcendent reflection but active preparation for action, according to Dewey and other Pragmatists, and knowledge was not passive universals but models for conduct in a historical present. Hence the schemes of meaning upon which men conduct their lives are better thought of as models or plans of action than as pictures of reality. A Pragmatic definition of knowledge, Albert Levi (1959) writes, is "an act securing the future (by the procuring or avoiding of consequences) through the exercise of foresight."

A central thread in the social psychology of Dewey and Mead is this emphasis upon the role in guiding present conduct of imagery of the future generated in the

present. Experience, Dewey (1917a) proclaimed, "is experimental, an effort to change the given; it is characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown; connection with a future is a salient trait." Of course, it can readily be seen that the role of imagery of the future in present conduct might vary among historical settings, that in some times and places people's actions might be more dependent upon images descended from the past, out of tradition.

Thus Dewey and Mead's psychology, in its full detail, may best be taken as a model of historically specific modern American styles of conduct rather than a scientific theory with universal applicability. This, however, does not undermine its value, for we agree with Dewey and Mead that human nature acquires its full definition and meaning only in, not independent of, historical contexts. Translated into models for social analysis their psychology gives us relevant models of action among modern populations whose life styles are often legitimated with reference to images of a future as much as images of a past preserved in tradition.

Moreover, the theory does seem to carry the more general implication, of overwhelming importance for the human studies, that the explanation of human conduct must take account of the role of humanly constructed images, visions and conceptions--whether of the past or of the future--and cannot merely ascribe behavior to external determinants. This recognition undoubtedly could have occurred only in a time and place where men were overly optimistic about the future, as Dewey and Mead were, and therefore sought ways of explaining how the future is invoked in present conduct.

The early Pragmatists made the individual self-stimulating, but left the source of the forms he adopted to realize his impulses chiefly within himself, leading to a "great man" picture of history. The shift effected by the later Social Pragmatists, chiefly Dewey and Mead, was to make the source of the forms taken up in the realization of impulses a social process. Later these formulations would lead to a socially determined conception of the self, and symbolic interactionism would be taken up by social behaviorists as evidence for the internalization of social values and norms by the individual. But at the time the ideas appeared, to men struggling to remake their world, the result was to liberate rather than chain the individual, for behavior was truly pictured as the outcome of an interaction of individual and social factors, not rigidly determined from either side.

I

Symbolic interactionism emerged in tandem with widespread and seemingly concerted shifts in American middle-class outlooks and life styles. The individualistic Pragmatism of James and others had paralleled the scattered and disorganized dissent of the Mugwumps from the social order of the Age of Energy, but the later social Pragmatism appeared amidst the seemingly organized drive by the middle class to remake themselves and their world in the Progressive movement. Recent scholarship pictures Progressivism as not merely a series of political reforms but a general cultural process in which the middle class devised modern, twentieth-century styles of life (Hays, 1957, 1965, 1967, 1969; Kennedy, 1975; O'Neill, 1975; Wiebe, 1967, 1973). Whatever its political results, which scholars now rightly question, the popular movement for a New Democracy centered in the expanded cities did result in the construction of modern urban-oriented styles of life. John Higham (1965) writes:

> From the middle of the nineteenth century until about 1890 Americans on the whole had submitted docilely enough to the gathering restrictions of a highly industrialized society. . . .
>
> By that time a profound spiritual reaction was developing. It took many forms, but it was everywhere a hunger to break out of the frustrations, the routine, and the sheer dullness of an urban-industrial culture. . . . In the 1890's the new, activist mood was only beginning to challenge the restraint and decorum of the 'Gilded Age.'

Higham notes the relationship between the ideas propounded by the Pragmatists and the new mood and thrust of the cultural revolt. "The revolt of these men against intellectual rigidities," he writes, "closely paralleled the assault in popular culture upon a confined and circumscribed life."

Intellectual historians tend to picture elites as the source of ideas and innovations, which then "filter down" to the masses beneath. But it might be a moot question whether Pragmatism provided intellectual inspiration to Progressivism, or whether it might better be regarded, like literature, as a historical and symbolic description of cultural developments surrounding it. For us personally, the latter interpretation causes no grief, for in contrast to what we take to be the naive hopes for a nomothetic social science held by the symbolic interactionists themselves, we believe that the human studies achieve some precision when they attempt to provide a sensitive description of life in particular cultural worlds. In spite of Progressivism's own claims that it was making a new world, however, there is some measure of historical continuity within the American cultural tradition, and as a sensitive account of cultural developments of its own time, symbolic interactionism in some measure also offers a relevant model of cultural movements at other times in American history.

With the exception of Cooley, all of the architects of symbolic interactionism spent a major part of their intellectual lives at the University of Chicago, and the perspective was extended and applied there as well in the sociological investigations headed by Thomas, Park and others as the Chicago sociologists made

a laboratory of the rich and variegated life of the industrial metropolis. The symbolic interactionist model of action guided by images of a future generated in the present mirrored the excited hopes for a New Democracy held by people in the burgeoning metropolis which never had the traditions of the East and lost most of what little tradition it ever had in the Chicago Fire. Hugh Duncan (1965) writes:

> The new people of the Middle West lived in a present lighted by a future. Their present was determined by gleaming futures, not the golden pasts of Boston or Europe.

We believe there is a close relationship between the emergence of symbolic interactionism and the appearance of new perspectives in Chicago journalism of the time. As the Chicago sociologists and philosophers searched for new intellectual models to describe the changing life around them, Chicago's reporters cast about for new styles of expression to give form to the drama of life in the industrial city.

Chicago in the 1890's formed a good medium for the growth of new attitudes among reporters. The city had burned in 1871 -- the most devastating yet perfectly timed major urban fire in American history. At the time the city was poised for a commercial leap that was only hindered by the accumulated moral and social baggage of Chicago's history. The fire removed the physical structure of the downtown area. All the old wooden buildings were gone. During the next few decades the city was in a frenzy of reconstruction and a major architectural revival occurred. The triumph of the reborn Chicago was symbolized in the 1893 Columbian Exposition or World's Fair, where the industrial rebirth and rise to dominance of Chicago was proclaimed. Although the style of architecture of the Fair was not representative of the great work being done in Chicago, it did announce the importance of art and architecture in the life of the city.

The fire did far more than remove the old wooden structures of the city, however. It also burned away the old social attitudes. Hugh Duncan has described how the "Old Settler Elite" who dominated social life in Chicago progressively lost ground after the fire. They were replaced by the parvenu business and commercial elite. Social life was dominated by the daughters of the rich, with more money than taste. Their major problem was how to spend money in ways that would express their social position in the proper way. Solutions were found, of course, and have been adequately described by writers like Duncan and Thorstein Veblen. Conspicuous consumption produced the bejewelled Mrs. Potter Palmer, who owned a "dog collar" necklace containing 2,268 pearls and seven large diamonds. Equally garrish was the Potter Palmer mansion, a Rhenish castle constructed without exterior doorknobs. One entered only when a servant opened the door. Inside, Mrs. Palmer displayed her collection of French Impressionist art, later to form the core of the Art Institute collection, but providing in its time a kind of ready-made Culture.

Thus was formed the context in which the reporters of the 1890's worked. The city was free of traditions, whereas many of the reporters who wrote about the city -- such as Opie Read and George Ade -- were not free from the more traditional worlds in which they had grown up. The dominant symbols of the city as expressed

in the architecture and social life were commercial, monetary and manipulative. On the other hand, reporters were also painfully and personally aware of the very different conditions of life of the worker, the immigrant and the impoverished ordinary people of the city, many of whom had been drawn to Chicago, like the reporters, by the images of success and growth of the new city. Reporters often lived in the middle, writing of the wealth and spectacle of the city, and of the grinding life of the ordinary urban dweller. Strategies had to be devised to give form in the newspapers' columns to the new dramas of life within these variegated, changing and developing urban worlds.

Coupled with the developments in the city about him were changes in the reporter's own trade. Chicago newspapers in the 1890's were in the midst of a massive change from the journalism of the nineteenth century toward what we know as modern journalism today. This change has been described by journalism historians as a change from personal journalism to a major business activity. Another historian suggested the transition took place as a series of "eras," first the era of the editor, then the age of the reporter, later the era of the columnist. Certainly, however it is described, the change is evident. It begins with the penny press of the 1830's when newspapers were carefully organized into separate departments. Financial, religious and crime news were segregated for the benefit of differing groups of readers. By the 1920's this change in the organization of the newspaper reached full blossom as the daily press was filled with a variety of syndicated and local columns documenting the worlds of the gardener, the homeowner, the entertainment-seeker and so forth. Nearly every urban activity could become the province of some columnist, who periodically served an audience with information, news and, often enough, identity.

The rise of the column in the daily newspaper coincided with the general spread of the ideology of objectivity and new commercial techniques. Briefly, adherence to objectivity became a greater and greater pressure late in the nineteenth century as newspapers spoke to wider and wider audiences. The newspaper hoax, for example, which was so common and so enjoyable to readers in the early nineteenth century, became an outrage when the audience no longer shared the common knowledge necessary for a reader to see the humor in a falsified story. Further, as the urban audience for the mass newspaper had such diverse interests, new techniques were needed to gain wider circulations. The creation of the column and special interest story served these needs well. Objectivity in a sense standardized newswriting around a set of well understood rules. The objective, multi-interest newspaper became the universal mass circulation urban daily, in which the ordinary reader could find a standard format and quickly discover which stories pertained to his or her interests. The newspaper, by this natural process of modification, thus began to cater to the separate worlds existing within the city.

A parallel development was taking place in the working lives of newspaper reporters in Chicago in the 1890's, and likely in other large metropolitan areas as well. A number of the better known newspaper writers in Chicago at this time developed an ethos or a style that is often a part of the feelings and attitudes of urban reporters even today. Various scholars have described this ethos as consisting of particular feelings and attitudes toward life and work, as well as toward events in the city. Some reporters developed "twin defenses" of sentimentalism and cynicism, which hardened them to the crime and tragedy they reported,

yet allowed them to still identify with the innocent victims of a harsh world. Reporters became detached from the worlds they reported. Many adopted a satirical-cynical attitude toward the dominant commercial life of the city. They developed social worlds of their own through professional identifications and membership in newspaper clubs and organizations. Imaginatively, reporters began to develop a myth of the urban reporter which simply described a style or stance that one could adopt in relation to the sometimes chaotic urban world of the 1890's.

In the midst of these developments, Chicago reporters, struggling to capture the drama of the urban life about them, developed a perspective not unlike the perspective devised by their academic counterparts also caught up in the life of the city --the perspective now known as symbolic interactionism.

The perspective of symbolic interactionism can be seen in two major characteristics of Chicago journalism in the 1890's. First, reporters focused on group life. They came to understand their own world through group identity and saw others as group members too. Individuals were frequently portrayed as deriving their identity from group affiliation. Second, reporters focused on the social dramas in the city. Within these dramas, they saw meanings created -- sometimes special meanings that could only be interpreted if one held the key to the language or action involved. Together, these perspectives link the Chicago journalists to the social scientists who later gave formal expression to the ideas of symbolic interactionism. The reporters, of course, never used the language of social science, nor thought of their jobs as in any way associated with that field of study. They were relating experience in what seemed to them a natural and thoroughly understandable fashion. Nevertheless, the particular shape of their reports, the nature of their outlook on the world and the view of group life they developed were uniquely appropriate to their times.

The two major works which document the change in style among Chicago reporters in the 1890's are Larzar Ziff's The American 1890's (1966) and Hugh Duncan's The Rise of Chicago as a Literary Center (1964). Reporters, according to Ziff, realized they were "contributing to the growing gap between social reality and its public representation by writing for papers which lovingly gave the details of a murder side by side with a piece designed to bolster the constant editorial claim that the United States of America was the most enlightened nation in history." Two defenses, according to Ziff, protected the reporter against this realization -- cynicism and sentimentality:

> The first kept him from allowing his sentimentality to make him vulnerable; the second kept him from allowing his cynicism to cut him off from the human interest that was his stock in trade. Joined to the hard-drinking editor with the green blinder and the blue pencil, in the legend that emerged, was the hard-drinking reporter who could talk with dry wit about the hundred and one stiffs he had seen fished out of the river and shed spontaneous tears over the urchin maimed by a passing omnibus.

Duncan took a sociological view of this changing era of journalism. He saw the relationship between a highly dramatic style of writing and the social groups surrounding the newspaperman. Drama was the means of interpreting and understanding

the actions observed every day on the streets. While literary ambitions drew nearly every writer's imagination, the chances to fulfill such dreams were few. The only institution in the city capable of financially supporting a writer was the newspaper; the only social institution suited to his temperament was the press club. Publishing, in the fields of literary magazines and fiction, was not a major Chicago enterprise. Duncan saw the connections between the groups and institutions that supported the newspapermen and the dramatic writing style they developed.

George Ade, who between 1890 and 1900 served the Chicago Record as reporter, feature writer and columnist, provides one of the best examples of the rise of a symbolic interactionist perspective in the newspaper world. Ade came to Chicago in 1890, the product of a small town in Indiana, educated and introduced to the wider world by Purdue University and Sigma Chi fraternity. His earliest reporting experiences in Chicago took him to the scenes of deadly explosions on the Chicago River, to police stations where the hardened police reporters taught him the routine and to sporting events such as the Sullivan-Corbett fight which aroused great reader interest.

Ade's first major long-term assignment was covering the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. On that assignment Ade developed the technique of dividing the world into separate compartments, peopled by a strange assortment of characters. It was a natural response to the World's Fair, which was organized into separate buildings, each housing a number of distinctly different displays. In one cubby hole would be the Arabian exhibit, another had the Japanese pavilion and across the way the farming tools from the Nebraska delegation were on display.

George Ade wrote five articles a week for a year, each one introducing his readers to some new, strange and marvelous aspect of the fair. Readers in the countryside for many miles around lived inside the walls of the fair as they read each installment of Ade's reportage. They discovered the treasures sent from the Orient for display, watched as a mural painter went about her business and froze alongside workmen building the exhibits during midwinter storms.

But eventually the fair ended, and with it George Ade's assignment. His editor, Charles Dennis, saw that Ade's talent was too great to waste on the night police beat. Dennis once again cleared two columns of space for Ade to do with as he pleased, and the famous cartoonist John T. McCutcheon did the illustrations. This series of sketches, stories and miscellaneous observations called "Stories of the Streets and of the Town" ran daily for seven years.

In those columns, Ade portrayed the life of the varied social groups in Chicago. There were the dockworkers, the clerks and office workers of the tall buildings in the Loop, the young status-conscious tenants of thousands of rooming houses, and all the different occupational groups ranging from shoe-shine boy to the "board of trade young man." Ade focused on the visible and accessible occupational, ethnic or geographic cultures of the city, such as the merchants in the Haymarket, Chinese laundries, dockworkers or the Jews of Junktown. Always he had an unerring sense of each group's language. His stories served to introduce his readers to the social displays of their own city, and to some of the meanings to be discovered in the action taking place, almost as if Chicago was just an enlarged World's Fair.

The Chicago of George Ade was radically different from his boyhood experiences in Indiana. He was witnessing a change in feeling, the separation of a general community sentiment into smaller, more private worlds defined by the symbols that created meaning. As Ade became aware of the significance of a striped collar, a reefed trouser, and the status associated with particular hairstyles or methods of smoking a cigarette, cultural worlds materialized before his eyes. Take for example the subject of flowers. In one small interaction between Ade's idealized Negro shoe-shine boy, Pink Marsh, and his sophisticated morning customer the subject came up. Ade and most of his readers would assume a flower is a flower, but to Pink Marsh flowers could have a very special meaning. Ade (1897) wrote:

> "I tell you, seh. 'Bout fo' weeks ago, I dream nothin' but flowehs. I seem walkin' in fields 'ith nothin' but jus' flowehs as fah as I could see. I'd see sunflowehs and mawnin'-glo'ies an' pinks and ev'y kind o' flowehs -- mo'n I eveh seen befo' in all my life. Well, seh, nex' mawnin' I kep' thinkin' 'bout 'em flowehs, an I say, ' 'At sutny means scmeping.' Afteh breakfas' I stops in at Clem Lesteh's bahber-shop on State Street an' see in his book 'at if you dream wil' flowehs, 'e row is three--seven--twenty-eight, an' if it's flowehs done up in bo-quets, you want to play nine--thurty--fift'-two. Well, seh, I seen all kind o' flowehs, so I jus' say I play wil' flowahs an' bo-quets, both."
>
> "What is this play -- policy again?" asked the morning customer.

In Pink's world a knowledge of the intricate meanings attached to playing the numbers racket gave one a respected position. If one knew the symbolic key, success could be read in another's clothes and failure was as easy to detect. Gradually Ade learned that, unlike the small town, the presence of a number of people in the same physical location did not create a town. The town was formed in the imagination, depending on what symbols of dress, money, work and identity moved in one's world. George Ade began to focus on the meanings involved in the interactions -- the symbolic interactions -- of people.

Part of the reason for Ade's interest in social groups in the city was his recognition that groups played an important role in his own life. He counted very heavily for his identity on membership in Sigma Chi, and the knowledge that he was a product of Purdue and Indiana. Further, he was a club joiner -- from the fraternity to professional groups, and including one of the strangest social clubs that ever existed, the Whitechapel Club of Chicago. In the Whitechapel Club, Ade encountered and adopted the style of the Chicago reporter, learned a great deal about interpreting the world and met the greatest Chicago newspaper reporters of his day.

The Whitechapel Club was first and foremost a group of Chicago reporters, many of whom were the best of their day. Charlie Seymour, Finley Peter Dunne, Wallace Rice, Charlie Perkins, Charley Almy, Opie Read, Brand Whitlock and George Ade were members.

The clubhouse decorations boasted of the reporters' cynicism and hardened outlook. Hangman's ropes, skulls, murder weapons and the belongings of executed

criminals, prostitutes and slaughtered Indians covered the walls. These souvenirs advertised the urban reporter's immunity from the shocks of life. Yet nearly every Whitechapeler had literary ambitions. Each admired the person who was sensitive, articulate and witty, like Pete Dunne or George Ade. Everyone hoped to write a great realistic novel that would catch the tone and meaning of city life.

As a group, the Whitechapelers made a major contribution to the myth of the modern urban reporter. They were cynical, hard-drinking, witty, talented and literary. The public antics and personal style of the club members was admired and emulated by a host of younger men who followed them. Said Larzar Ziff (1966):

> The myth that was to survive well into the next century and lure such as Ernest Hemingway had its foundation in men who insisted on talking to one another about the hypocrisy of the social system even while they were being paid to explain it away, whose faith in the big scoop was not entirely alien to a faith in the power of prose, and who read everything they could lay their hands on and fanned one another's literary aspirations as they sat about the city room on a rainy night.

The Whitechapel Club was a force behind the myth of the urban reporter because it provided the symbols around which that legend could form. The skulls and other macabre decorations of the club, the witty one-liners of Pete Dunne and Charlie Seymour, and the ribald and satirical poetry of talented literary reporters like Wallace Rice and Ben King meant much to others who followed in their footsteps. It provided a style -- cynical and sentimental, literary, witty, hard-bitten -- that could cement together the experiences of the urban reporter.

The Whitechapel also provided social acceptance for a dramatic rendering of the world in newspaper accounts. Most Whitechapelers had served on the night police beats. The world of crime was especially attractive for a reporter assigned to the city desk. The criminal world had its own special terms and meanings, created in social dramas. Other social conflicts lent themselves to colorful writing: the conflict between the rich and the working class in certain transitional neighborhoods, the closed and aloof life of the business world and the ever-present conflict over money. In the 1890's reporters recognized first that residents of the city were members of different groups, and second that they were moved by different symbols and dramas. The meaning of life could be discovered in the drama of different groups fitting their lives together.

The Whitechapel Club is only the most unusual of a number of reporters' institutions which contributed support to newspapermen -- ranging from press clubs to unions to bars. The contribution of the Whitechapel Club was a set of symbols that created a legend and a perspective that focused on the dramatic in life. Both complimented the type of symbolic interactionist perspective that writers like George Ade were beginning to exercise.

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective on the world. While reporters possessed the perspective, they never thought of it in social science terms like "symbols," "institutions" or "dramatism." But the underlying assumptions had much in common. The perspective was one in which reporters came to agree that the symbolic rendering of the world was of primary importance. Their work focused

on the slang, the vernacular, and the creation of meaningful symbolic terms. One group of Chicago writers created a whole lexicon of terms to interpret the game of baseball. They recognized that the naming of objects and actions was interpreted within a social world using mutually understood symbols. Group feeling emerged from the meanings and definitions of situations that these symbols made possible.

The prime characteristics of Chicago journalism, as written by George Ade, Finley Peter Dunne and a host of lesser lights, were a literary style -- to portray the symbolic rendering of action and the meaning of acts -- and a dramatic style -- the fashion in which experience came to create groups.

II

Among the varied cultural and political movements on the Chicago scene around the turn of the century, symbolic interactionism was most closely linked in spirit with Progressivism. Indeed, the theory might be regarded as an intellectual account of the Progressives' images and conceptions of the ideal community. Dewey, Mead and Thomas were all active in reform efforts on the local scene.

Two bodies of scholarship have presented different pictures of the central actors in the Progressive movement. An older body of scholarship pictured typical Progressives as members of displaced and disorganized status groups anxiously watching familiar worlds crumble in the face of industrial organization, who revolted in an effort to reassert the values of their own departing communities and to reestablish their own deteriorating status (e.g., Hofstadter, 1955; Mowry, 1951, 1958, 1972). However, some recent scholars have seen as central figures in the Progressive movement, not backward-looking groups who wanted to reestablish nineteenth-century genteel culture and to rein in the new industrial institutions, but rising groups of scientifically minded professionals and managers at home in the new urban-industrial order, who sought ascent for themselves in its institutions (e.g., Hays, 1965, 1969; Wiebe, 1967, 1973).

We would suggest that it is not necessary to choose between these interpretations, as some scholars have implied, for the literature and imagery of Progressivism--and symbolic interactionism is a good example of this--reflect the effort to transform older conceptions of community, rooted in the imagery of nature, religion, small town life and so forth, into an optimistic vision of a new community in the making under the auspices of the beneficent deity of science.

The Progressive struggle for "the people" against "the interests" was not an assault upon private property but upon concentrated power, an effort to restore the New World's promise of freedom for the individual from the chains of the Old World's stagnation and class structure, which the rise of urban-industrial society had brought to American shores. As George Mowry (1972) writes:

> Largely an upper middle-class movement, at least in its leadership, progressivism was not opposed to private property but rather to the impersonal, concentrated, and supposedly privileged property represented by the behemoth corporation. Looking backward to an older America, it sought to recapture and reaffirm the older individualistic values in all the strata of political, economic, and social life.

To do so, Progressivism devised an Americanized Marxism--a promise for the salvation of the middle-class individual from the forces of concentrated power and the illegitimate rulers it supported. Progressive intellectuals, David Noble (1970) writes, offered a scenario to "purge the parasitical aristocracy and liberate the productive middle class." However, the individual to be liberated was not the isolated atom of the Newtonian world machine, but the member of an archetypal American community--the New England small town, the primary group, the religious community, the frontier settlement, in short, any of the manifestations of the uniquely American community that nurtured individualism instead of stifling it as did the decadence, over-civilization and social complexity of the Old World.

Thus the changes wrought by urbanization and industrialization required the Progressives to forge a new synthesis of the sundered ideals of individualism and community. On the one hand, in the new urban settings and complex organizations, the individual had lost the sense of participation in a communal activity, and Dewey and Mead, as well as Progressive social workers like Jane Addams, worried about how to restore a sense of dignity and meaning to mechanized factory work.

On the other hand, the rise of a complex organized society doomed the chances for the individual, coinciding with the literal and symbolic closing of the frontier. In his famous paper, Frederick Jackson Turner (1894) argued that the frontier had been the source of the distinctive and prized traits in the American character -- individualism, egalitarianism and a commitment to democracy. Turner was literally wrong, as a group of authors took the trouble to document a few years ago, for, as they showed, the traits he associated with the frontier actually had much earlier roots in the American heritage (Hofstadter and Lipset, 1968). Nevertheless, Turner pointed to a pivotal dilemma in American cultural life, for in the nineteenth century the frontier and other imagery associated with nature had been the bedrock upon which countless Americans had kept alive their cherished ideals and heritage. Thus Progressivism, as Vernon Parrington (1930) wrote, "was the first reaction of America to the revolutionary change that followed upon the exhaustion of the frontier -- an attempt to secure through the political state the freedoms that before had come from unpreempted opportunity."

The Progressives' deepest mission, then, was not to curb political and economic power, but to undertake an enterprise of cultural reconstruction: to replace the no-longer-compelling cultural forms and models of conduct associated with nineteenth-century life styles with new models and symbols to revitalize the traditional ideals of what Robert Bellah has called America's "civil religion." "By civil religion," Bellah (1975) writes, "I refer to that religious dimension, found I think in the life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in the light of transcendent reality."

A central element in the American civil religion, Bellah notes, is "the act of conscious meaning-creation." In a similar vein, Sheldon Wolin (1978a) observes, "Among modern peoples, Americans were virtually the first to attempt a deliberate act of collective self-definition." And this is exactly what the Progressives were trying to do -- to stage a reenactment of that archetypal American act of creating a New World in the present -- and what the symbolic interactionists were trying to describe in their theories of how people build a community in the present out of hopes for the future instead of traditions descended from the past.

Bellah locates the roots of America's civil religion in the fusion of two traditions -- the Puritan, from the Bible through John Cotton and John Winthrop, and the Republican, from ancient Rome through Montesquieu and Jefferson. Present in each tradition and made into the heart of the American civil religion was the drama of liberation followed by institution, the overthrow of an ossified and oppressive social structure followed by the building of a new structure to take its place. In the Puritan tradition, the successive moments in the drama were represented by the terms "conversion" and "covenant," in the Republican tradition, by "revolution" and "constitution." Thus R. Jackson Wilson (1968) describes "the classic model of experience in America--liberation from 'tyranny,' followed hard

and fast by the self-conscious creation of new, 'free,' but inevitably coercive means of stability and cohesion, followed again by new challenges in the name of liberty redefined."

What Bellah means by the Republican tradition that entered the American civil religion was not merely a formal system of natural rights -- freedom to pursue individual self-interest, as it would later be interpreted under the influence of utilitarianism -- but a conception of freedom that embraced what Irving Kristol (1972) calls a "Republican morality." "In the 17th and 18th centuries," Bellah writes, "freedom was part of a whole articulated framework of moral and religious values--it meant freedom to do the good and was almost equivalent to virtue."

A contemporary restaging of the archetypal American act of sloughing off the now oppressive legacy of the past and creating a new promise for the future -- which had stood at the center of the nation's civil religion throughout its history -- was what the Progressives were trying to carry out and what the symbolic interactionists were describing in their theories. The symbolic interactionists shared the general faith in melioristic reform of sociologists of their day, and this faith expressed the spirit of such contemporary movements as the Social Gospel and social settlement movements as well as Progressivism. The early sociologists often rejoiced at their emancipation from the constraints of the old social structure amidst which they had grown up -- typically the small town with its Protestant culture -- but, as Jean Quandt (1970) has shown, at the same time they tried to revive some of the central features of that structure -- cultural homogeneity, an absence of sharp class lines and a sense of community and common purpose. Thus Quandt includes some early sociologists and symbolic interactionists in a group she calls the Communitarians, who sought to revive communities in the urban-industrial order.

Symbolic interactionism, then, presents a model of the Communitarians' vision of the new community they were making, but its central elements were to be revivals of themes which had originated in the Puritan and Republican traditions, and which had most recently resided in the nineteenth-century models with which the Communitarians had grown up -- the small town, the agrarian community, the frontier settlement and so forth. Cooley, for example, held what Lewis Coser (1971) calls a "small-town doctrine of human nature" and wanted to reawaken the sympathy forged in the primary group of the small town on a wider scale in the modern world. As Mead (1930) wrote:

> His sociology was in a sense an account of the American community to which he belonged, and pre-supposed its normal healthful process. This process was that of the primary group with its face-to-face organization and co-operation. Given the process, its healthful growth and its degenerations could be identified and described. Institutions and valuations were implicit within it. The gospel of Jesus and democracy were of the essence of it, and more fundamentally still it was the life of the spirit.

There is another way of looking at this. Cultural systems can be looked upon as social myths in which men express a faith in some symbolic construction employed as a representation of the self, a model to be used for conceptualization of the

self. As Durkheim (1915) argued, when premodern peoples imputed human qualities to natural phenomena, "They have not conceived the world in their own image any more than they have conceived themselves in the world's image."

For Progressives and sociologists of their time, the old grounds of faith and self-conception -- God, nature, the small town, the frontier -- had lost their capacity to express a viable image of the individual, had become ossified and imprisoning social structures, and role models anchored in those grounds had become unattractive. A rebirth in new imagery was needed. For an earlier generation of American intellectuals, the Transcendentalists, nature had supplied the symbolic forms for a conception of the transcendent individual, but now doctrines grounded in nature were used by the Social Darwinists to justify the predatory behavior of the Robber Barons. In place of the shattered foundations of older models of American individualism, the Progressives tried to devise new faiths -- in "the people," "the city," "society" or "science" -- and new role models for themselves grounded in those faith.

Since laissez faire had failed to preserve the individualistic American milieu, allowing instead the rise of the Plutocracy, it seemed necessary to reformers to arouse "the people" out of their complacent slumber and into action against the menace. Instead of European-style class conflict, the task ahead was one of moral education, to spread the reformers' own alarm, enlightenment and virtuousness across the land.

As Dewey analyzed the situation in The Public and Its Problems (1927), in the urban-industrial world there was no public and hence no democracy. Democracy could not be simply a set of formal mechanisms and practices, but depended upon the active participation of an alert, enlightened, right-thinking public. It was necessary to recreate the lost public of the small town, such as Dewey's boyhood home of Burlington, Vermont, and that required the resurrection of a sense of mutuality and common purpose which could only exist, as it had in the small town, upon the foundation of a shared culture. The making of this new wider harmonious public, free of the social conflict and class divisions of Europe, was the hope expressed in the social-psychological models of Dewey and Mead.

To religiously minded reformers, the situation called for the spread of their pieties throughout the land, and there is abundant documentation of efforts by Progressives to impose Protestant morality as an official ethic in the Temperance Movement and other drives. But as Timberlake (1963) showed in his study of the Temperance Movement, scientific arguments against alcohol were becoming more compelling to many Americans than religious arguments. The siren-song of the future, heralded by Dewey and others, was the forward-looking gospel of science, reason and progress.

Dewey and his cohorts did not regard scientific knowledge and symbol systems as merely instrumental -- mere tools, techniques, cold facts. Throughout his writings Dewey (e.g., 1925, 1934) stressed the dual nature of symbols as potentially instrumental and consummatory, the latter property referring to the potential capacity of symbolism and communication to infuse experience with felt meaning, a sense of satisfaction -- the prototypical example of consummatory symbolism being art.

The loss of the public required for democracy, as well as the loss of meaning and purpose for the individual in the urban-industrial order -- the Great Society that had not been transformed into a Great Community -- lay in the fact that it was bound together in patterns of human relationships that were only instrumental and not consummatory, such as commercial markets and fragmented work roles. To restore consummatory value to political relations, market relations and mechanized work roles -- to transform the Great Society into a Great Community -- could be accomplished through the spread of scientific knowledge, the making of a common enlightened culture, Dewey and others thought, because scientific knowledge, and human relationships founded upon it, unlike commercial relations, could be both instrumental and consummatory.

Recently some scholars have argued that values and orientations deriving from religion or science should not necessarily be seen as standing in conflict in American history, that instead religious outlooks often have been transformed and given rebirth in a secular religion of science, manifest in the technocratic promises held out by the scientific management movement, professional ideologies, the social science movement and so forth (e.g., Akin, 1977; Griffin, 1970; Haber, 1964; Quandt, 1973; Rosenberg, 1976). In his classic work Max Weber (1930) showed how the Protestant Ethic was transformed into a commercial ethic, which eventually degenerated into the spectable of commercialism and materialism of the "gospel of wealth." But the newer secular religion of science can encounter a similar fate, for, as Kenneth Burke (1935) showed, a scientific orientation, if unchecked, can degenerate into a "technological psychosis."

Looked at another way, the task facing the Progressives was to find a new force capable of turning the large-scale institutions of the urban-industrial society, now in the clutches of venal businessmen and corrupt politicians, into agencies for the good of the community and the people, agencies that would foster freedom for the individual instead of concentrated power to oppress the people. Progressive intellectuals such as Charles Beard and Thorstein Veblen held out as saviors the bearers of the new religion of science. The new class of scientists, professionals and experts was pure and peaceful, unlike the predatory capitalists, and it was "disinterested." It would serve the whole people instead of its own selfish interests. Hence it would transform industrialism into a beneficent agency of progress for all. Under the aegis of these hopes, one outcome of Progressivism was, as David Kennedy (1975) summarizes a number of recent studies, the "successful effort of a new middle class of ambitious professionals and scientific experts to bring system and rationality to a society suffering from the evils -- even if democratic evils -- of disorder, inefficiency, and localism."

The trouble with the new vision, of course, was that "the people" of the Progressives' rhetoric never existed and were given no effective input to the bureaucratic agencies set up in their name. As Harvey Zorbaugh (1929) laconically remarked of the governmental agencies set up by reformers, "It is not democracy in the old sense." In the absence of any effective check by "the people," it remains unclear whether the managerial and professional ideologies grounded in scientific values do not serve principally the interests of the new classes which are their bearers. But one chief legacy of the cultural ferment of the Progressive era was the spread among increasing sectors of the American middle class of the role models and life styles of professional scientists and experts in place of older and now tarnished models such as the businessman.

III

As Alan Dawe (1970) has argued, the history of sociology is really the history of two different kinds of sociology, which Dawe calls the "sociology of order" and the "sociology of control." The "sociology of order" had its roots in a reaction to the Enlightenment and industrialization by European conservatives alarmed at the rise of individualism. It originated in a search for the forces in the modern order that would mold and restrain the actions and passions of the new masses formerly restrained by the authority of tradition. The result was the quest, carried on in so much of mainstream sociology, for the elements and variables in the social structure that mold, trigger and check the actions of individuals.

In place of the conservative search for the forces that would restrain individualism, the American liberals who were the architects of Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism sought ways of releasing individualism from the forces of privilege. As a result, symbolic interactionism is a form of the "sociology of control," which seeks to understand the way men and women devise and build a community or a social order to gain control of their destiny. Control, in the sense in which Thomas and Park used the term "social control," is not an aspect or operation of the external social structure that acts upon persons within it, but consists of the models and forms of conduct devised by persons in action. Rather than studying social organization or social structure as an objective reality, then, symbolic interactionism seeks to describe cultural models or plans of action as they are known, felt and used by the actors.

The key step in reaching such an approach to sociological concerns, begun by the individualistic Pragmatists and extended by Dewey and Mead, was to shift from the focus upon thought of the intellectual tradition to a focus instead upon action. The key question, the Pragmatists believed, was not how people carried on thought as a process of passive contemplation, but how people acted in the world.

The inspiration to such a switch lay at the heart of the American heritage, for, as Daniel Boorstin (1978) has recently argued, the whole distinction between thought and action loses its meaning in American life. Dewey was trying to awaken in the new Promised Lands of society and science the now stifled experimental spirit engrained in the American political tradition. Whatever the present moot fate of his hopes, the result nevertheless was to give us a signally relevant model of American models of life, and to offer also, we believe, some relevant contributions -- though more limited -- to a general framework for studies in culture and communication.

The "root image" held by symbolic interactionists, Herbert Blumer (1969) has written, is the proposition that society "exists in action and must be seen in terms of action." In the works of the most elaborate theoretical architect of symbolic interactionism, George Herbert Mead (1934, 1938), the key concept is the "social act," in which persons imagine or construct in consciousness their anticipated lines of action. To do this, they must be able to imagine or prevision the outcome of the act and the intentions and probable actions of others involved in the act.

Human minded behavior, Mead holds, is not most distinctively or importantly the rarefied contemplative state of thought studied by philosophers, but consists in getting phases of action into consciousness in the imaginative acts in which we formulate and experiment with lines of action. From the social psychology of Mead and Dewey, as from the work of Marx, we can derive the challenge to philosophy that thought is rooted in social contexts, and it was with this discovery that Dewey abandoned his early attachment to Hegel and turned to Pragmatism. John Petras (1968) writes:

> True to his philosophy of interactionism, Dewey dismissed the notion that there was such a thing as pure thought or pure reason. While philosophy has labored under the disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, it has actually been occupied with social values embedded in social conditions.

But instead of conceptualizing the relevant social conditions as economic relationships, symbolic interactionism points to the process of meaning creation in which men and women devise plans of actions and models of human relations, which may of course include economic relations. The advantage of this approach is that it gives us a powerful and productive way of looking at the meanings which are the content of human mental and imaginative lives, and which are recorded in cultural productions such as mass communications. From this perspective, meanings are thought of as models of action, rather than countersigns of thought or pictures of reality. Thus Mead's "significant gestures" and the symbolic interactionists' "social objects" are symbols that represent finished acts, which are employed in consciousness prior to action in anticipation of the outcome of action.

The symbolic interactionists were attempting to overturn the individual-generated perspective on human motivation of their opponents, but without dissolving the individual into a socially determined conception of the self. The specific formulations and terms of the social psychological models they proposed varied among authors and sometimes shifted over time in the writings of the same person. Nevertheless, the general idea was the same: to see action as the product of an interaction between individual and social factors. In the formulations of Thomas (1951, 1966), innate "wishes" and social "values" both impinge upon the process in which persons construct "definitions of the situation" and establish "habits" that may become more-or-less unthinking. When these are disrupted in a "crisis," "attention" again comes into play to forge new forms of "control" (patterned forms of conduct). Thus Thomas leveled his famous attack on Durkheim's attempt to explain behavior entirely by social values, arguing that social values always interacted with individual attitudes in the production of the definitions of the situation which persons employed in the formulation of their actions. And of Dewey, C. Wright Mills (1964) said:

> He will always take a view that leaves man's biological nature plastic enough to make social reforms possible, but he will try to keep it unitary enough to be the seat and anchor and implicit standard of certain values. He will deny fixed "instincts," but keep modifiable "impulses," and thus steer clear of determinism on either side and allow for freedom. . . . Again, he will not lose the individual, the center of "intelligence" and the agent of social change, but the individual will not become a passionate,

> instinctive animal. He will be a "social" creature, and in this sociality will reside some of his goodness and his rationality.

The symbolic interactionists were trying to retrieve the individual by having his freedom and individuality realized in and through society. In substituting "impulses" or "interests" for the "instincts" of the older psychology, they were trying to conceive of action as governed by an innate capacity whose "satisfaction can take place only within the bounds of what is called human society." (Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975)

If you want to argue that you can not have it both ways, that may well be, and that may be why a vision that appeared to the Pragmatists and Progressives to liberate the individual by offering a rebirth in the imagery of Dewey's New Individualism appears to later generations to stifle the individual. For, again, in trying to have both individualism and community, the Pragmatists and Progressives were attempting to revive the central promise of the American civil religion. In so doing, they transferred to the new Promised Lands of society and science the same tensions between those warring ideals that had existed in America's religious, political and commercial cultures. Society, pregnant with the promise of a rebirth of individuality to the Progressives, becomes to some latter-day Americans the bearer of the specter of the "other-directed personality," from which some now seek escape.

In arguing against instinct theories in psychology, Dewey advanced the proposition that "interaction" (meaning the interaction of the individual and society) must be taken into account as a factor in motivation. Later this would be taken to imply that interaction works as an external determinant of the individual's conduct, as in other formulations the "society" in which Dewey's New Individual was to realize his individuality would instead become the determinant of his actions. This would happen even within one later school or branch of symbolic interactionism, the so-called Iowa School under Manford Kuhn, which became one more form of social behaviorism as its members adopted supposedly scientific methodologies to the exclusion of the interpretive methods -- what the Germans called verstehen -- made necessary by the original position of the Chicago School.

Let us concede that there are abundant passages in the writings of Dewey and other early symbolic interactionists to support the deterministic interpretation of their position. Nevertheless, we would emphasize that they also saw interaction and society as arenas for the expression of the self. If society constrains persons' actions, it also appeared to the symbolic interactionists as the avenue in which persons devise, enact and celebrate their conceptions of freedom and individuality. And it is necessary to keep this phase of the process in sight if the visions and conceptions by which men and women act are to be grasped.

This was the great advantage of the symbolic interactionists' attempt to straddle the individual-social dichotomy. For a time it diverted attention from the question of which pole was the determinant. In the interlude the symbolic interactionists looked instead to a process that was going on in between the poles, so to speak, as in the widespread social change going on about them groups of men and women were devising new styles of life and models of conduct. Symbolic interactionism, then, directs your attention not so much to either the individual of social determinants of action as to the cultural models and symbolic forms that

persons employ in forging lines of action, and to the processes in which persons build, sustain and transform those models and forms.

We might argue that the ground of action should be seen to lie, not in interaction or in society, but in the realm of language, symbols, culture. As Hugh Duncan (1962) wrote, "Symbols do not reflect motives: they are motives." But this shift of the ground is less crucial than the argument against a deterministic interpretation of it. We do not mean to propose culture as one more external determinant, to be studied as a variable that influences conduct, but as the field within which persons devise plans for and interpretations of their actions.

Instead of conceiving of society or groups as the determinants of individual action, there is another, more productive way we can incorporate a social element into the symbolic interactionist model. Society and groups may be thought of, not as the sources of the models and imagery employed by persons in conduct, but as potential elements in the content of the models and imagery that people themselves devise. When Tamotsu Shibutani (1955) says that the person possesses a "society in miniature" in his imagination, we may interpret this to mean, not that society innoculates the individual with its norms and values in a process of internalization, but that the individual devises in his imagination a symbolic representation of his world, among the central elements of which are persons and groups and relationships among them as he imagines them from his perspective.

Cooley (1902) argued that the "solid facts of society" were the "imaginations which people have of one another." In contrast to the "spatial knowledge" of science, Cooley (1926) distinguished "social knowledge," which consists of the images people devise of other people and groups and of the dramatic patterns of action and interaction taken to represent surrounding patterns of life. Cooley argued that it was a mistake for social scientists to try to reduce social knowledge to spatial knowledge, that human actions could be understood only in relation to the social knowledge upon which they were predicated and that this could be uncovered only by a process of "sympathetic introspection" or interpretation.

IV

The central ideas in the theories of the early symbolic interactionists remain relevant to a framework for the study of communication and culture, and also remain relevant as models of the characteristic hopes that resurface in revivals of what we have called, following Robert Bellah, the American civil religion. Nevertheless, symbolic interactionism has many blind spots and limitations -- some of them rather obvious -- as a framework or perspective for social analysis. In many ways, its omissions and shortcomings were aptly patched up as its insights were incorporated into, but extended and modified, as the Chicago School of Sociology developed perspectives for the investigation of urban worlds.

While the theoretical architects of symbolic interactionism were developing their ideas, a major shift was under way in American sociology. The First Generation of American sociologists -- Sumner, Ward, Giddings, Small and Cooley -- had been grand theorists and system builders. But in the midst of their contentious theoretical disputes, there was arising, mainly at the University of Chicago, a Second Generation that would simply ignore their elders' debates, discard their concerns as unproductive and turn instead to the study of life in the "little worlds" in the burgeoning industrial metropolis of Chicago.

The approaches and problems staked out by W. I. Thomas were influential with the Second Generation, and his work remains valuable to students of social and cultural life today. But Thomas straddled the two generations, and his forced departure from the University of Chicago in 1918 denied the rising generation easy access to him.

Leadership of the ambitious program of urban research fell to Robert Park, whose famous paper, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment" (1915) often is regarded as the signal of the turning point between the generations. In Park's varied and scattered writings (many of them collected in Park, 1950, 1952, 1955) are to be found, we believe, the outlines of a powerful perspective for social and cultural analysis, which he never brought together in a systematic statement, due in part, no doubt, to his skepticism about the earlier attempts at grand theorizing. Park drew heavily upon symbolic interactionism, but incorporated it into a more tempered and realistic perspective on social life.

Alvin Gouldner (1970) has argued that whether or not social theories seem plausible to social scientists often depends upon how the theories resonate with the "structures of feeling" among the social scientists themselves in particular times. The differences in perspective between Park and the symbolic interactionists can largely be ascribed to the different moods and "structures of feeling" they brought to bear in their work, due to their personal biographies, intellectual influences upon them and the differing vantage points from which they looked upon the social order in the times and places in which they forged their perspectives.

Looked at in one way, the theories of Mead and Dewey were an intellectual version or representation of the social myth of the Progressives. As the Progressive movement surged froward, its platform -- like Mead and Dewey's theories --

took on the scent of victory, as an aspiring status group saw itself, and the society under its benevolent leadership, marching forward under the triumphal banner of science, reason and progress. Consequently, in one sense, as Leon Shaskolsky (1970) has remarked, symbolic interactionism is "a utopia which happens to be written in the present tense."

Park had an engrained distaste for the reformers, having acquired in his days as a journalist some of the cynicism of the Chicago reporters of the time. But more important, he began his career as a sociologist at a time when the buoyant optimism of earlier sociologists and reformers was dissipating in the war and the flagging zeal of the Progressive movement. Consequently, he brought to the study of social life a less optimistic, but more sober and realistic perspective than his predecessors.

As a picture of the overall drama of life in society, on the one hand, and of the very nature of the human personality, on the other, the theories of Cooley, Dewey and Mead had one glaring flaw that Park immediately saw: Their naive optimism had led the symbolic interactionists to suppose that conflict could be eradicated as an element in the life of society, and as an element in the formation and definition of the human personality. In the sort of consensual model so typical of American social thought, the symbolic interactionists had supposed that everyone could be harmoniously united in the Great Community which they, like the Progressives, hoped to build, and that every individual would achieve his individuality and self-definition from the satisfaction of fulfilling his role in the grand harmonious order.

On one level, the problem with it, as with the programs of so many groups of American reformers, was that it depended upon the happy assumption that everyone would be equally enchanted by the reformers' own models of conduct and visions for society, which were, of course, to furnish the cultural edifice of the Great Community. But on another level, as Park had perhaps learned from his teacher Georg Simmel (1955), the problem was that human nature seems to require conflict as well as love -- villains as well as heroes -- in the very definition of the human self.

Consequently, Park took the valuable insights about communication processes of the symbolic interactionists and incorporated them into the kind of perspective on social life that Albion Small had been working with. Society, to Park, consists of a status order in which social groups seek to legitimize, advance or protect their status, which, from the subjective side, contributes to the definition of the identities or self-conceptions held by the group members. You may equate status with interest, if you like, provided that you mean "material and ideal interests," as in the formulations of Max Weber (1968).

Park, like Weber, regarded as inadequate the attempt to treat the relationships among social groups as if they were independent of cultural processes, the mere automatic reflex of power drives or economic interests. Park conceived society, at least as an analytical abstraction, to have an existence on two levels -- the ecological or biotic order of impersonal processes of competition and adjustment among groups, these processes standing outside the awareness of the group members; and the cultural or moral order of relationships, interactions

and conflicts among groups that become part of the imaginative lives of group members as they acquire definition and significance in culture.

To Park, the most interesting feature of human society was the transformation of impersonal competition into recognized cultural conflict in processes of communication in which group relationships are given cultural definition and become public so that the dramas of these relationships enter into persons' imaginative lives. This process is speeded up and enlarged in modern societies increasingly blanketed by agencies of mass communication. Thus communication processes stand at the center of Park's sociology. But unlike the symbolic interactionists who expected communication to produce consensus and fellow-feeling among the participants, Park saw that it also exacerbated tensions as unrecognized competition was, with increasing rapidity, transformed into conscious conflict. Park's approach does not imply that group relationships do not involve power or economic interest, only that the relationships are more fruitfully studied through, rather than independent of, the communicative processes of symbol formation in which they are given meaning in human experience.

Implicit in these formulations is another crucial shift that Park effected in the focus of the symbolic interactionist ideas. Given the liberal-individualist outlook of Americans, it is not surprising that, in the writings of the early theorists and many later symbolic interactionists, the unit of analysis, the actor whose symbolically formulated actions were under consideration, was often the individual. Park, steeped in European social thought saw the individualistic formulations of American thinkers as an unproductive base for social analysis.

Park ducked the whole issue of the relationship of the individual to society by making the "actor" under study a social group, in an attempt to more adequately chart larger social and historical processes. In the textbook used to train generations of graduate students, Park and Burgess (1921) argued that "men act typically, and so representatively, not as individuals but as members of a group." Consequently, sociology should concern itself with the "study of collective behavior and 'corporate action.'" It should investigate the "cultural process" in which social groups devise the symbolic worlds in which they dwell -- worlds "which are found organized in public opinion, in religious symbols, in social convention, in fashion, and in science."

Park effected some shift -- though probably not enough -- in the direction of bringing a historical perspective back into the excessively ahistorical formulations of the symbolic interactionists. In contrast to their models of the production of consciousness out of interaction processes in the present, the way in which their own hopes amounted to a revival of a traditional American faith illustrates that history can not be so easily erased.

Park proclaimed sociology a science in search of "natural laws and generalizations." Contrary to much later criticism, he did try to develop generalizations, which often go unrecognized as such because he wanted to generalize to social processes rather than to social structures. Nevertheless, much of Park's work was more like a blend of journalism and history than science. Therein lies its advantage, in richness and sensitivity to human affairs, over the flattened picture that emerges through the prism of the statistical consciousness that infests so much social science today. Park himself regarded statistical methods

in the social sciences as "a little like parlor magic," and, lacking the excessive optimism of the reformers, he considered science no substitute for history. Park and Burgess (1921) wrote:

> Just as none of the investigations or generalizations of individual psychology are ever likely to take the place of biography and autobiography, so none of the conceptions of an abstract sociology, no scientific descriptions of the social and cultural processes, and no laws of progress are likely, in the near future at any rate, to supersede the more concrete facts of history in which are preserved those records of those unique and never fully comprehended aspects of life which we call events.

In what was perhaps their most obvious shortcoming, the social psychological models of Mead and Dewey pictured the self, mental processes and communication as essentially cognitive and rational affairs. This bias was due, we believe, to the fact that the models were, in part, representations of the Progressive ethos -- of ideology, if you like -- which saw itself as the bearer of an enlarged rationality that hopefully could be spread across the land to forge the cultural fabric of the Great Community.

In his early days, Park had been a co-partner, with Dewey and Franklin Ford, in the short-lived effort to publish a newspaper, Thought News, that would spread an enlarged rationality in human affairs more widely. But unlike the Progressives and reformers, Park soon soured on such hopes, realizing that men inhabited different cultural worlds, that humanity could not all be swept up in one world of rationality and that, besides, rationality was not the sole ingredient in the fabric of a cultural world. Unlike Mead (1964), who bemoaned the "unsatisfied animal impulses" to which most newspapers appealed, Park simply accepted the fact, however grudgingly, that most people read newspapers more for "human interest" features than for factual knowledge.

Park agreed with Dewey that social scientists should study the patterns of meaning employed in action within a cultural world -- "consensus" as Dewey called it -- but dissented from the implication that this consensus was primarily a rational affair. In the description of a cultural world, Park wanted to uncover its peculiar "joy," "zest for life" or "vital secret" as well as its cognitive templates. In their textbook, Park and Burgess (1921) wrote:

> Dewey, however, seems to restrict the use of consensus to group decisions in which all the members consciously and rationally participate. Tradition and sentiment are, however, forms of consensus quite as much as constitutions, rules, and elections.

The hopes of the reformers, soon to be abruptly dashed, were crucially related to two developments of the time: the rapid expansion of agencies of mass communication in the Communications Revolution of the late nineteenth century, and the widespread movement and reorganization of populations in the midst of urbanization and industrialization. In the midst of the "social disorganization" surrounding the movement, persons were detached from the customary frames of reference of stable cultural worlds, tradition or, as Park put it, "the cake of custom." The

reformers saw two possible outcomes: the "public," or the Great Community, in which all would take up rationality in place of tradition as a frame of reference, or the volatile "mass," whose members would act upon individualized and irrational passions and would fall under the sway of lurid motion pictures and sensational newspapers (e.g., Blumer, 1954).

Park, however, saw that social disorganization -- from the subjective side, the "individualization of behavior," as Thomas (1923) called it -- was a temporary, not a permanent state of affairs. Out of the crucible of traditional worlds and taken-for-granted patterns of conduct and meaning, now shattered in massive social reorganization, would emerge new worlds -- the "little worlds" of Chicago studied by Park's students, as well as various communities linked together by agencies of mass communication -- in which social groups would devise new models of conduct and styles of life. And the task which Park took up was to describe the cultural patterns and frameworks in the making in these worlds, rather than to bewail the fact that their members failed to enter the enlightened world of rationality held out for them by the reformers.

Thus an image of modern society as consisting of processes of disorganization followed by reorganization -- the breaking, transforming and remaking of the cultural frameworks within which persons conduct their lives -- stands at the center of Park's sociology. As Leon Bramson (1961) has pointed out, this is precisely what is missed in so much American social science which, with its individualistic perspective, studies the actions of individuals while neglecting the larger frameworks of meaning within which such actions take place.

One of the most frequent criticisms leveled today at Park and the Chicago School, as well as symbolic interactionism, is their neglect of social structure. The introduction of the concept of social structure -- as well as such related concepts as social system and institution, in the sense in which they are now used -- perhaps signals the most important shift in the perspectives of American sociologists since the days of Park. The earlier sociologists were not unaware of such concepts as social structure, but dismissed them as unproductive for a very good reason which, we believe, needs to be relearned by social scientists today. In his textbook, Small (1905) had applauded the "shifting of effort from analogical representation of social structures to real analysis of social processes." The process view, Small thought, "has gone a long way toward seeing through the weaknesses of the mechanical and organismic models for society."

Park (1915), realized that the product of human action was a structure which, "once formed, imposes itself upon [people] as a crude external fact, and forms them, in turn, in accordance with the design and interests which it incorporates." Even so, "this structure has its basis, nevertheless, in human nature, of which it is an expression." Park was not arguing for the rightness or justice of existing social arrangements and institutions, but for the advantage of studying them as products of human action rather than as something independent of it. The "designs and interests" incorporated into social structures originate in the life, actions and motives of social groups, and the structures can be best understood as the outcome of these group actions and motives.

In the formulations of sociology's latest grant theorist, Talcott Parsons, something of a latter-day Herbert Spencer, the social system and its structures, functions and institutions are given a positive cast as the benevolent edifice into which a contented population is harmoniously integrated through a common value system. Parsons' critics turn his formulations around, making the structures and institutions into malevolent forces that rob individuals of their freedom. No doubt they do, but you can explain them better as the product of the will, motives and actions of human actors than as inhuman "secular devils" that act by themselves. Whether it is called "the social structure," "the social system," "institutions," "technology" or "the media," the reification of a force out of human control and acting on its own in the world obscures the cultural processes of meaning formation in which are forged the human imperatives to build such institutions and structures.

This mode of thought is prevalent in the discussion of mass communication, often, we believe, to our disadvantage. Whereas Europeans have seen the life of their societies to revolve around the actions and relationships of classes and status groups, Americans wedded to a liberal-individualist outlook have been prone to grasp and record their history around such alternative axes as institutions, technology and communications media -- all treated as if independent of the social complexes of motivation expressed therein.

Progressives and reformers looked expectantly to new agencies of mass communication to spread enlightenment and rationality, and they looked fearfully upon media that seemed to be the bearers of alternative worlds of experience and styles of life -- such as motion pictures and sensational newspapers. But their heightened expectations and fears of the potency of the media sometimes obscured their underlying concern about the models of community and styles of life being forged within the enlarged worlds of experience those media made possible.

Much of the alarm about agencies of mass communication -- especially in the midst of social change and reorganization -- is a reflection of alarm at changes in the standing and visibility of various status groups in the society and of the styles of life and the conceptions of community they bear and represent -- both the groups which produce and the groups which consume the media fare. The discussion of mass communication in America would be advanced by a tempering of the tendency to discuss the media solely in relation to their technologies, organizational structures and content treated in a narrow and piecemeal fashion, accompanied by a shift to the focus pioneered by Thomas and Park of looking at the media as arenas of cultural expression by social groups which express, develop, advance and do battle over their respective conceptions of community and styles of life.

V

Why has there been in recent years a resurgence of interest among social scientists in symbolic interactionism and among historians in the Progressive period? Breifly, we believe that scholars have been exploring, wittingly or no, the parallels to, as well as the roots of, some developments of the more recent past.

As Americans of the late nineteenth century witnessed the rapid expansion of agencies of mass communication in the Communications Revolution, so in more recent decades have we watched the emergence of television and other new communications technologies. In the earlier time, reformers and Progressives looked to the enlarged media as agencies for building wider worlds of rationality and enlightenment, while they looked fearfully upon the motion pictures and sensational newspapers that seemed to be drawing vast sectors of the populace into the alternative world of the faceless and volatile mass. More recently, Marshall McLuhan held out for us the parallel specter of the "global village," while hopeful liberals looked to public television, cable television and other new communications technologies as potential agencies for building enlarged communities of culture and enlightenment.

Scholars have generally concluded that, from the point of view of political and economic change, the Progressive movement failed. Sometimes the failure has been ascribed to the separation of liberal reformers and radicals after the 1890's, when they sometimes cooperated. So too might such an analysis be made of the more recent time. For the unheeded attacks of such critics as C. Wright Mills (1959) upon the "social system" imagery in social theory and the statistical consciousness underlying social research correctly targeted pivotal developments in the ascending ideological edifice of the technocracy -- which offers persons new scientific rituals alongside the commercial rituals such as shopping of industrial society, new role models as scientific professionals and, as Sheldon Wolin (1978b) has written, "the new form of collective identity" implicit in the concept of social system as a new model of community.

But such an analysis is in some ways naive, for it rests upon the over-optimistic hopes of recent critics and reformers who, like some Progressives, overestimated the possibilities in a period of social change and reorganization. Moreover, it illustrates our complaint about social analysis couched in such concepts as social structure, social system and institutions. Such analyses abstract the issues from the cultural worlds of the populations under discussion, dissolving their orientations and outlooks into the analyst's abstractions, and fail to take into account the alternative hopes and conceptions of community which, for better or worse, other groups hold. The issues posed by a technocratic society are not simply the workings of its structures and institutions, but have to be seen also as crucially located in the cultural life of worlds in which these concepts are devised and held as conceptions of community.

Paralleling the rise of vast new urban worlds around the turn of the century, with large sectors of the population discarding older frames of reference and struggling to devise new models of conduct and styles of life, was the ascendency in the post-war period, as C. Wright Mills (1951) announced, of a new middle class.

Its members often lacked or found irrelevant in their new suburban settings the traditions of older sectors of the middle class and were searching for new models of conduct and new benchmarks of status in the social order. Park's insight that the social disorganization attending widespread movement out of familiar worlds was followed by reorganization into new worlds, rather than permanent membership in either the enlightened public hoped for or the volatile mass feared by the reformers, seems to have proven correct again.

As Orrin Klapp argued (1969), much of the social unrest of the 1960's was only incidentally about political and economic issues, and reflected more importantly a search for identity models. The population was reorganizing itself -- not along the political lines hoped for by radicals, nor into the worlds of culture and enlightenment envisioned by enthusiasts of the new technologies -- but into the professional communities and leisure or "life style" worlds which, perhaps to our dismay, seem to be the outcome. But so in the Progressive period, scholars are now concluding, political reform was only incidental to a general modernization of the middle class, accompanied by the ascent of new middle-class managerial and professional strata.

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